

Developing Healthy Relationships: Talking Points

Since the late 1980's, April has been recognized as Sexual Assault Awareness Month (SAAM). SAAM is a time to focus on preventing over 73,000 cases of sexual assault that occur each year in the United States. This year, SAAM activities and events across the country will emphasize ways to build healthy, respectful relationships. This focus brings a new, positive approach to raising awareness and promoting prevention of sexual violence.

Below are talking points to help you or your organization talk about sexual assault prevention in the context of healthy relationships. Although these talking points support 2005 SAAM efforts, they can be used at any time to talk about the importance of healthy relationships and preventing sexual assault. For more information on SAAM campaign ideas, materials, activities and resources from across the country visit the National Sexual Violence Resource Center (http://www.nsvrc.org/saam_new/index.html).

Messages

- ***Relationships are not perfect*** - Feeling angry, hurt, or upset at times is normal. But feeling scared, humiliated, pressured, or controlled is not the way a relationship should make you feel. Instead, you should feel loved, respected, and free to be yourself.

Action Step: Support your significant other through the language you use and the actions you take. Respect your partner and your partner's decisions, including those involving sex. Never force someone to engage in sexual activity. This is sexual assault, whether you are dating, married, living together as a couple, or are just friends.

- ***Talk with each other*** - Communication is essential in healthy relationships. Couples should take time to talk with each other - respect each others' opinions, and feel comfortable asking each other questions even about sex.

Action Step: Take time to talk and listen to your boyfriend, girlfriend or spouse. Express your thoughts and feelings clearly and directly, without intentionally hurting or disrespecting each other. Even if you disagree, never pressure your significant other about sex.

- ***Family matters*** - Families are an important part of everyone's lives. Family members help shape beliefs, provide support, and can serve as role models. But sometimes families can reinforce violent behavior. Actions with intent to abuse, humiliate, harass, or degrade another leads to unhealthy relationships. Children learn what they see and hear. Without healthy relationships from which to learn, children can grow up to act out and be in sexually abusive relationships (American Psychological Association, 1996).



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Action Step: Simple changes in the way you act in front of your children can prevent sexual violence. For instance, speak up when you see your son or daughter mistreat others physically or emotionally. Talk to your children about what it means to be in a healthy relationship where couples do not hurt each other physically, sexually, or emotionally (American Psychological Association, 1996).

- **Friends count** - Friends are an important source of support and advice. Friends play a powerful role in shaping attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors about rape and sexual violence. Friends should speak up when they know of or see a friend insist on sex. Talk with each about other what it means to give and receive respect.

Action Step: Friends should not accept excuses for violent acts committed by people they love. Confront the abuser - only if you can do it safely. Let the abuser know you don't approve of the behavior; and discuss changes that can be made to have more productive, healthy relationships (Golding, Wilsnack, and Cooper 2002).

- **Building Blocks.** Trust, honesty, and respect among friends, family, and others play critical roles in healthy relationships. Respect your boyfriend, girlfriend, husband or wife's wishes when it comes to their body. Never ignore protests and respect your partner's right to say 'no' to things that cause discomfort.

Action Step: Treat your wife, husband, boyfriend, girlfriend, friends, and family with the same trust, honesty, and respect that you would want. Your partner does not need to be "putting up a good fight" to be raped. Respect your husband, wife, girlfriend or boyfriend's rights to sex and sexual contact (Golding, Wilsnack, and Cooper 2002).

- **Violence Is Never Okay.** Intentional violence is never the victim's fault. Violence doesn't always mean physical abuse. Abusive relationships can occur any time someone intentionally attacks you physically, sexually, or psychologically. Abuse is never okay. Never make light of abuse or try to justify or excuse violent behavior by blaming the victim.

Action Step: Express your thoughts and feelings clearly, directly, and respectfully. Whatever the circumstances, no one ever asks to be raped. Respect your boyfriend, girlfriend, wife, or husband. Don't impose your will because you think your partner will like it, that you deserve it, or that you think your partner is asking for sex.

If you or someone you know is a victim of sexual violence and needs immediate help, contact the Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (RAINN) Hotline at 1-800-656-HOPE (4673), National Domestic Violence Hotline 1-800-799-SAFE (7233), or contact your local emergency services at 9-1-1.



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For more information on healthy relationships or Sexual Assault Awareness Month visit the National Sexual Violence Resource Center http://www.nsvrc.org/saam_new/index.html or CDC's National Center for Injury Prevention and Control <http://www.cdc.gov/injury>

References

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